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First place for space



Will Hawkins

With features tailored to UK buyers, this Benimar is a tempting option in the entry-level coachbuilt market

BENIMAR PRIMERO 202

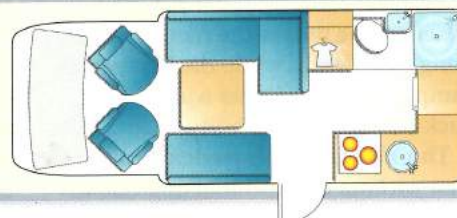
Price from: £46,995

Berths: 4 **Travel seats:** 4

Base vehicle: Fiat Ducato

Length: 5.99m

Gross weight: 3,500kg





It's a spacious lounge that also includes two rear travel seats, although the cab chairs are at a different height and there's a step in the floor level, too

This Primero 202 is built in Spain solely for the UK market (and sold exclusively by Marquis Leisure). It is a low-profile model based, like almost all of its rivals, on a Fiat Ducato base. The 202 (one of four models in this new range) has four berths and four travel seats, but it works best as a two-person 'van. Unusually for an import, the habitation door is on the UK side, and (like all Primeros) it's compact, too, at fractionally under six metres long.

The driving sensation was speed without haste, comfort without indulgence, and efficiency over style. The typical 2.3-litre, 130bhp, Euro 6 diesel engine moves the motorhome along effortlessly, while the lowered Camper chassis with its wider rear track ensure good stability.

There's a generous payload, too, even without the optional upgrade to

a 3,650kg gross weight.

You'll not find a digital radio in the cab, but there's a standard 12V socket and a USB port left of centre on the dashboard, handy for charging or running gadgets.

You get cruise control and a passenger airbag, too, as well as cab air-conditioning – all without recourse to a pack of options. Also, the flip-up clipboard on the dash is useful for attaching information, like the height and width of the 'van – ideal if you're new to driving a motorhome.

The storage options in this standard Fiat cab are good and there are three cup holders to keep brews to hand. The only challenge with the cab, for me, was a personal one: I'm 6ft 2in and, with the driver's seat all the way back, I was comfortable, but the strut in the door's window (between the quarter-light and opening section)

partially obscured the wing mirror. I had to lean forward for a clear rear view behind.

The faux leather driver and passenger seats are comfortable and have a butter-soft feel. If driving in hot weather you won't stick to them and of course the air-conditioning will keep the temperature at an optimum anyway. Both cab seats rotate to face into the living space.

Over the cab, the deep shelf is of limited use as you'd be wary of stuff falling out when cornering. The folding ladder for the drop-down bed was found here when the 'van arrived but it seemed safer to store it on top of the stowed bed. There's a large skylight above the cab, too, which means that light streams into the Primero 202. With two reading lights in the cab you'll also have plenty of illumination at night.



One of the exterior storage lockers is accessed by this flap on the nearside



The big overcab sunroof is a welcome feature above the ubiquitous Fiat cab



If you intend to create a bed from the lounge, the drop-down bed will stop part-way down and you use the ladder for access

SECOND OPINION

"When used as a two-berth, the instant bed is the big appeal here (especially as it uses no space in the day)"

PETER VAUGHAN ROAD TEST EDITOR

LIGHT, FANTASTIC

Moving into the lounge, the Benimar Primero 202 has zebra-pattern, textured and net curtains (very continental) to let light in and keep unwelcome eyes out. The lounge feels big, surprisingly so as the 202 is compact (5.99m long) on the road. Inside, though, it manages to feel spacious, light, and airy.

With the cab seats rotated, a bench seat for two on the nearside and an L-shaped settee opposite, wrapping around the table, you could seat six to dine. This Benimar feels like a motorhome in which socialising is a breeze, if that's your thing. The tabletop slides (just squeeze a handle underneath to release it), so you can position it centrally between the seats, but it is rather big and doesn't fold in half or remove. It's also rather high in relation to the rear seats but more

convenient from the (higher) cab seats, which are up a small step in the floor level.

Above the lounge are eight LED downlights (set into the base of the electric drop-down bed) to illuminate the area. Given that I tested the Primero on a sunny winter's day, if you enjoy a light environment, you will love this motorhome.

If you have passengers with you, like grandchildren, strap them into two forward-facing rear travelling seats, which form part of the L-shaped sofa. Under these seats is the on-board water tank – at 120 litres it's a really good size and its inboard location is much better for winter camping than an underslung tank – and above them are the TV mount and connections on the wall. Next to the travel seats is an additional vertical light strip. It adds light into the area next to the

habitation door and kitchen at lower leg level.

SLEEPING LEVELS

The main bed is the multi-positional, electric drop-down one, which is limited to 230kg. Using a button on its rear-facing edge you lower the bed to where you need it. If there are only two of you, lower the bed to its maximum depth (making sure you've dropped the table – that's electric, too – and moved seat backrest cushions out of the way) and jump in. The mattress is 1.88m long (with space to overhang slightly at each end), 1.40m wide at the shoulders and 1.20m at the feet. On the bed's sides are safety nets for when you sleep in it in its raised position.

If you have guests (those grandchildren, perhaps) staying, you ►

LIKED



- Drop-down bed comes down to various levels
- Plenty of kitchen worktop

DISLIKED



- Rear seats rather low for table
- Height of toilet seat

WANTED

- Dining table to fold in half
- Higher shower doors



The kitchen has plenty of worktop and illumination, as well as a mains hotplate and oven/grill

will need to have the main bed at a higher level. For this situation, there is an extendable ladder. Then, the 'guest bed' is made up from the seat cushions. It's a bit of a jigsaw puzzle laying them out correctly and, if you like an even surface to sleep on, you'll probably want a mattress topper, but it's a big enough bed for two adults. You will need to compromise on the headroom split between the upper and lower beds, though.

For heating, the 202 has a 4kW Truma Combi gas/electric blown-air system and, with the Primero's Grade III insulation, you should stay warm.

COOK'S DELIGHT

Adding to the spacious feeling is the Primero's nearside kitchen, towards the rear. If you like cooking on holiday, Benimar makes it easier with this

kitchen. It's a stylish space with a generous amount of worktop. The horizontal surfaces have a cream-coloured finish, with a light brown wood finish on the vertical surfaces.

Within the worktop are the round sink and the hob. The sink diameter is 40cm, pretty good for two people's washing up, and there's a removable draining board. Under the sink is a cutlery drawer.

The Thetford cooker, specified for the UK, has two gas rings and an electric hotplate, as well as a combined grill and oven. From experience, these ovens make cooking easy, so you can roast, bake or grill anything you like. They are big enough to prepare food for four and ideal for two people.

The cupboard space in the kitchen is excellent. At eye-level, the shelved cupboard is 520mm wide and then, in

the rear corner, are three open shelves – don't forget to empty these before you drive off!

There are usefully sized cupboards under and alongside the oven, and below is a shallower drawer, which you'll probably use for frying pans. Both drawers have soft-close mechanisms – a nice touch for an entry-level model.

To illuminate the kitchen, use the switch to the right, near the habitation door, to turn on the downlights. It's civilised having not only the natural light from the window in the day but the downlights for a well-lit kitchen. The large side window here (and the other living area windows) has flat blinds (and there are unlined curtains for the cab – we'd budget to add blinds here, too).

The 81-litre Thetford fridge is quite small by modern motorhome



Looking rearwards, showing how that big table can rather dominate – pity the top doesn't fold in half

standards, so you'll probably need to shop for fresh food regularly. Above the fridge is a hanging wardrobe measuring 900mm high – perfect for coats and any clothes you want to keep creaseless. Surprisingly, there's a second wardrobe forward of the washroom, on the offside.

The only feature the 202's galley lacks is a microwave oven. That's one economy over the more expensive Mileo range.

NEXT TO GODLINESS

One space that makes a big difference to how you feel about any motorhome is its washroom. Cleanliness is next to godliness, as the saying goes.

The 202's offside, rear washroom feels classy and has unexpected spaciousness. The colour scheme is the same as the kitchen's, bar the

black panel that separates the loo and washbasin space from the shower.

There's a Thetford toilet, which sits on a plinth. That might be a problem for anyone who is more 'vertically challenged' than me and doesn't like their feet to dangle.

You get a small, shallow washbasin to the right of the toilet and above the basin are two mirrored cupboards. These could do with a shelf in each to split them up; they are tall and you will consequently have significant unused space.

Washroom details include a soap dispenser, a towel rail and two hooks on the inside of the door. And, there's a skylight and window to make this space bright, too.

The shower space is 1.33m wide, 0.64m deep and 1.95m high – enough for most people. The chrome shower unit sits on a tall, black glass-like

panel, which makes it stand out. You get a chrome-finish holder for shampoo or shower gel on the rear wall, too, but the shower's bifold doors have a gap at the top – don't flail that showerhead around too enthusiastically or you might spray the whole washroom.

The only mild criticism is the showerhead. It's a bit small and, after experiencing a more significant, round showerhead, might feel like a letdown. That said, you probably won't ever feel the need to use campsite facilities when you have a washroom like this.

APRES SKI

On the nearside is access to an external locker. It uses the space under the side settee and is 1.03m wide by 370mm high and 600mm ▶



An excellent washroom, although the toilet is mounted on a plinth



One wardrobe is over the fridge, another is forward of the washroom

deep. You'll probably use this space for mucky boots, levelling wedges, mains lead, etc.

The gas locker is at the rear nearside corner and will take two 6kg gas cylinders, but it is quite high so make sure you're happy lifting full bottles into it.

On the offside is a tall, external locker door. It contains breakdown equipment, including the jack. Also, there are 12V and 230V sockets for using electrical devices outside. This locker is 1.90m tall at its highest point, reducing to 0.82m high further in, 0.58m wide and 0.95m deep. You can access this space from inside the 'van, too, from opposite the kitchen. If you are a skier or a walker, this locker will be useful for skis or walking poles, and also for outdoor furniture.

The Fiat cab's black, unpainted bumper is a giveaway as to the Primero's budget status, but the framed habitation windows are a pleasant surprise at this price level. Bike rack mountings are pre-fitted on the rear, too, but the central locking doesn't include the habitation door and you'll need to dig deeper (or haggle harder) if you want an awning or reversing camera. **MM**

THE **MM** VERDICT

Primero is Spanish for 'first' and this Benimar will make a good first motorhome for many. It has more space inside than you'd expect in a six-metre model - the natural and artificial lighting, along with the layout, make it feel airy. It will suit couples, including those who have an occasional need for accommodating grandchildren, especially as the drop-down bed is easy to position at a height to allow use of the lounge bed.

THE ALTERNATIVES

Bürstner Harmony Line TD 590 £59,995
Chausson 530 Welcome £43,100
Roller Team T-Line 590 £49,180

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FACTS AND FIGURES



PRICE

From: £46,995
As tested: £46,995



BASICS

Berths: 4
Travel seats: 4

Warranty: Two years on base vehicle and conversion, five years water ingress

Type approval: European Whole Vehicle



DIMENSIONS

Length: 5.99m (19ft 8in)
Width: 2.30m (7ft 6½in)

Height: 2.89m (9ft 6in)

Gross vehicle weight: 3,500kg (optional 3,650kg)

Payload: 900kg



BASE VEHICLE

Type: Fiat Ducato Camper chassis-cab

Engine: 2.3-litre, 130bhp, Euro 6, six-speed manual gearbox, front-wheel drive



KITCHEN

Cooker: Thetford cooker with two gas burners, mains hotplate, grill and oven

Fridge: Thetford three-way, 81-litre



BEDS

Drop-down bed: 1.88m x 1.40m narrowing to 1.20m (6ft 2in x 4ft 7in/3ft 11in)

Lounge bed: 2.10m x 1.20m (6ft 11in x 3ft 11in)



ESSENTIALS

Fresh water: 120 litres (inboard)

Waste water: 105 litres (underfloor)

Space/water heating: Truma Combi 4kW gas/electric blown-air

Leisure battery: 90Ah

Gas: 2 x 6kg

OPTIONS

Fitted to test vehicle: None

Also available: Comfort-Matic robotised gearbox with 150bhp engine (£2,100), upgrade to 3,650kg gross weight (FOC)

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